



MEMO

TO: Senate and House Transportation Committees

FROM: Jordan St.Onge, Morrilltown Highway Superintendent/Road Commissioner

DATE: April 23, 2026

RE: Municipal Advocacy for Town Highway Aid

Introduction

- Thank you for your time today. My name is Jordan St. Onge, and I am the Highway Superintendent and Road Commissioner for the Town of Morrilltown.
- Morrilltown has the highest Town Highway mileage in Lamoille County at 92.13 miles. We also have 9 miles of Town maintained sidewalk, and 17 Town maintained structures.
- For the upcoming fiscal year, Morrilltown has passed a total municipal budget of approximately \$10.4 million. A significant 30% of that—roughly \$3.1 million—is dedicated solely to highway maintenance. While we are grateful for the \$240,000, we have budgeted for State Aid to Highways, it is important to note that this offsets less than 8% of our highway maintenance costs. Furthermore, these figures only cover routine upkeep. To address the mounting need for capital improvements, our voters recently took the proactive step of approving a separate \$233,500 article specifically for our Bridge and Infrastructure Fund and adopting Local Options Tax.

The Cost of Deferring Paving

- The math of road maintenance is simple but punishing: the longer we wait, the more it costs. Paving while a road is in "Good to Fair" condition is the only fiscally responsible strategy.
- As the condition of a road deteriorates, the amount of asphalt required to repair it increases, and the cost grows exponentially.

- Paving roads when they are in good to fair condition is the most cost-effective strategy.
 - It can be done with a ¾” overlay and costs roughly \$50,000/mile
- If a road falls to poor condition, it requires more costly pavement treatment
 - It requires a ½” shim, and 1 ½” overlay, and costs roughly \$132,000/mile
 - This is **164% more expensive** than paving the road when it is in good to fair condition
- If a road falls into very poor condition, it requires an even more costly pavement treatment.
 - It requires milling or reclaiming and paving up to 4” of asphalt and costs roughly \$287,000/mile
 - This is **474% more expensive** than paving the road when it is in good to fair condition.
- In 2024 Morristown contracted Greenman-Pedersen Inc. to conduct a pavement condition assessment and they stated:
 - “The strategy of fixing the roads in very poor condition instead of preserving good roads is known as the worst-first approach and generally regarded as the least cost-effective strategy. The explanation for this is that the roads are allowed to deteriorate until they are very poor and then spend large sums to make repairs rather than smaller expenditures that keep the road in good condition for a longer period of time. The common analogy is changing the oil in your car is more cost effective than waiting for the engine to seize and replacing the engine.”
- When we lack the funds to preserve "Good" roads, we are forced into a "worst-first" approach, which is the least cost-effective way to spend taxpayer dollars.

Paved Town Highways

- Since the GPI pavement condition assessment was done in 2024, we have paved 3.8 miles of Town Highways.
- 15.6 of our 36.8 miles of paved Town Highways are still in Poor to Very Poor Condition.
- That is 42.4 % of our paved Town Highway Network and represents a \$3.2 million dollar paving backlog.
- To catch up on paving we have implemented a 5-year plan that involves \$800,000 in paving a year.

- This special project would represent a 6.6% increase to our Town budget, on top of the 6.8% increase to our general budget due to inflationary pressures totaling a 13.4% property tax increase.
- This does not account for the deterioration of our roads that are currently in Good or Fair Condition.
- As a result, the voters of Morristown passed Local Options Tax this year.

Town Highway Class 2 Roadway Program

- Our only funding source outside of property taxes and LOT is the Town Highway Class 2 Roadway Grant Program
- The maximum grant award through this program is \$200,000, which is 25% of our annual paving needs.
- Less than half of Morristown's paved roads are Class 2, meaning 58% of our paved roads are not eligible for this grant program and rely solely on property tax increases or LOT for paving.

Sidewalks

- Of Morristown's 9 miles, or 47,000' of sidewalk, 6,000' is in very poor condition, representing a \$600,000 backlog.
- Part of our 5-year plan is to replace 1,500' of sidewalk per year, at a cost of roughly \$150,000/yr.
- If not for LOT, this would represent a 1.7% increase in our town budget and when done in conjunction with paving equals an 8.3% increase. This is on top of the 6.8% increase in our general budget for a total property tax increase of **15.1%**.

Structures

- Most of Morristown's 17 structures are noted in the VTrans Bridge Reports as needing repairs, including several that need significant work including repair or replacement of bridge decks and abutments.
- Our only funding source for bridge repair outside of property tax increases is the Town Highways Structure program with a max award amount of \$200,000.
- We recently held a competitive bid process to **paint** one of our bridges, and the low bid was \$286,000.

Summary

- In summary, current state funding levels fall short of municipalities' needs. VTrans Town Highway Aid Program offsets just 7.7% of our highway maintenance budget.
- Funding for special projects like paving, sidewalk replacement, and bridge repairs rely solely on grant funding, property tax increases or LOT.
- Grant funding for paving only meets 25% of Morristown's annual needs, and that's **if** we are awarded the Class 2 Roadways grant every year. The current Class 2 Roadway Program guidelines exclude the majority of Morristown's paved Town Highways.
- Grant funding for sidewalks falls short of Morristown's annual needs at 50% **if** awarded the VTrans Small Scale Bike/Ped Grant. This is an incredibly valuable program for us on a yearly basis.
- Grant funding for bridge repairs fall short of needs based on project cost vs. award maximum. The cost of just painting a bridge exceeds the maximum potential grant award offered through the Town Highway Structures Program.